

1830 Rev. Mr. Faethingham
with the Author's assent

A

SERMON

PREACHED BEFORE

THE ANCIENT AND HONORABLE

ARTILLERY COMPANY,

JUNE 7, 1830,

ON THE CELEBRATION OF THEIR 192^d ANNIVERSARY.

By C. STETSON.



CAMBRIDGE:

PRINTED BY E. W. METCALF AND COMPANY.

M DCCC XXX.

SERMON.

ROMANS xiii. 7.

RENDER TO ALL THEIR DUES: TRIBUTE TO WHOM TRIBUTE IS DUE; CUSTOM TO WHOM CUSTOM; FEAR TO WHOM FEAR; HONOR TO WHOM HONOR.

THE Christian religion is no less opposed to anarchy and license than to misrule and oppression. So far as its principles are known and its power is felt, it secures social harmony and personal rights. It renders to all classes and to each individual whatever they are entitled to claim. The subject suggested by my text cannot be without interest to a body of high-minded men, who have assembled in the temple of God to recognise their obligations as Christians, while their banners and arms indicate their readiness to protect the rights of their fellow-citizens. The charter of your institution has been handed down to you through a long succession of Christian patriots, whose anniversary for nearly two centuries has been celebrated by religious services. Our associations therefore with this festival are of a religious, rather than a military character, for they gather round the memory of the pious and the brave of former days; who, in their stern conflicts with savage nature and savage man, were sustained by the power of a still sterner faith.

The object of this discourse is to show that the Christian religion tends to secure the rights of men. It does this by defining their mutual obligations, by settling the true principle of

equality, by its effect on civilization and public opinion, and by its peaceful spirit. These are the topics which will successively invite our attention.

Christianity protects the rights of men by defining their mutual obligations. The Apostle from whom I have borrowed a text was an uncompromising champion of personal freedom. "Stand fast," said he, "in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again in the yoke of bondage." This earnest exhortation relates particularly to religious liberty—liberty of thought, speech, and worship—which Christianity declares to be the right of all men, and imposes upon all men the obligation to respect it in each other. It is impossible that this sacred right can be safe, if we are subject to arbitrary and oppressive control in other respects. When individual men are once allowed to have rights which no human power can touch, there is an end of despotic authority; the reign of reason, law, and principle commences. It is easy to see that religious freedom can have no secure or permanent existence unless protected by civil institutions which reverence all personal rights. An absolute government may be tolerant, it is true, from policy or principle, but toleration is not enough—the very name implies the right to coerce. The power which tolerates to-day, may persecute to-morrow. There should be nothing insecure in the "liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free"; and he who has been taught to reverence his dignity as a child of God, will not be the patient and cowering slave of man. The mind accustomed to free speculation on the most important of all subjects, is "regenerated, disenthralled"; it has an expansive power which brooks no needless restraints. It will indignantly throw off every kind of oppression.

It was no part of our Saviour's purpose to inculcate maxims of political science, or encourage resistance to established authority. Yet we know that the spirit of his religion is wholly opposed to oppression in all its forms. It allows no injury

to the rights or feelings of the lowliest individual. It confers indeed no new civil privileges, but it confirms what nature gave, by making every man, whatever be his station or his power, true to his relations. It allows a more unqualified liberty than if it had given its sanction to even the best form of civil government; for it addresses us as individuals free to select the means by which we shall accomplish the ends of social existence. The civil organization, by which we are bound up into communities—restrained in our natural liberty and made amenable to human law, is the result of accident—or at best an artificial creation of society which has grown out of our weakness, our wants, and our sympathies. And it matters not whether the institutions, under which we live, exist by our voluntary choice, or our simple acquiescence; it is an excellence of Christianity that, in either case, it recognises the relation and points out the duties which arise from it.

This divine religion is adapted to give us safety and happiness by breathing a spirit of universal justice. While it enjoins "obedience to the powers that be," it imposes on these powers the reciprocal obligation of protecting all the personal rights of those who obey. All men—rulers as well as subjects—kings as well as elective magistrates—are under its law; and it commands them to do to others as they might reasonably wish to have others do to them in a change of conditions. As Christianity has so clearly defined the mutual obligations of its disciples, the inference seems easy, that, when they are violated on one part, they are no longer binding on the other. A tyrannical government, that disregards the sacred duties which the possession of power imposes, has no title to our reverence. It is a system of merciless wrong, perpetuated by fraud or violence, which may righteously be broken down and swept away by an indignant people who feel or fear oppression.

These plain maxims are not stated as any thing new; they were the maxims of our fathers—felt—reasoned upon—acted

upon. They assert the natural rights of free, individual man, of which no social compact can deprive him. They were not conferred, but settled and secured, by the principles of our religion. They depend on no written charters—man can neither give nor take them away. It seems to me, that the very providence of God has sanctioned them, by the successful toils and sacrifices of our Puritan ancestors, who held in one hand the sword which defended, and in the other the Bible which contained the charter of “Christ’s freemen.” They believed that this blessed charter could never be safe in the absence of civil liberty.

Their spirit did not die with them. At a later period, the descendants of those pilgrims, who had resisted “principalities and powers and spiritual wickedness in high places” for their Christian rights, inherited the same unconquerable energy of will in times of dismay and peril. These were men who gave a peculiar character of holiness to the war of our Revolution. They had studied human rights in the school of Christ; they had drunk deeply of his spirit; and they united—as perhaps they had never been united before—the endurance of the martyr and the daring of the hero, in their great cause. They were intelligent men, whose far-reaching wisdom saw the distant “shadows of coming evil”; and they afford an illustrious instance of the effect of Christianity, especially of Protestant Christianity, in securing the dearest rights of mankind.

Again, our religion leads to the same result by settling the true principle of human equality. It is a received republican maxim, that “all men are born equal”; but it obviously is not the intention of Providence that they should long remain so. The popular notion of equality requires modification. It is not true, that all men have actually an equal right to the same things, as wealth, honor, influence, power—but that all have an equal right to the unmolested enjoyment of whatever they can honestly obtain.

It is clearly impossible that we should all have the same social advantages in a free community, when they are open to the vigorous competition of very unequal merit and industry. Christianity secures to every man his own. Its claims are satisfied, not by a levelling system, or an Agrarian law of plunder—but by a system of social justice, that protects every one in the standing, to which his relations, talents, or exertions have raised him—allows every one to employ the influence which his wisdom and virtue ought to give him—in short, defends every one from injury in his person, his feelings, or his interest. It recognises no class as privileged to oppress and grind down their fellow-men. But while it treats the poorest and obscurest individual as a child of God, under his Heavenly Father’s protection, it also acknowledges rights growing out of the artificial distinctions of society. It inculcates that comprehensive love which “worketh no ill to a neighbour, and therefore,” St. Paul said, “is the fulfilling of the law.” This spirit of love makes every one who shares it, just to the claims of those above him, and generous to the feelings of those below him.

The Christian doctrine of equality, then, gives no countenance to the madness which God has sometimes suffered to seize upon the multitude—exasperating them against legal authority—spurning the influence of the wise and the good—tearing asunder the bands of social order, and bringing disaster and woe upon nations by making lawless force the measure of right. It is not the mere numerical strength of an unreflecting majority, which ought to govern; but the concentrated wisdom of a people, which resides in deep-thinking, high, and gifted minds. It is the glory and safety of a nation to know how to find and value and employ this wisdom.

It is a very common mistake that truth and right are necessarily found with the majority. “We figure society,” says an eloquent writer, “as a machine, and that mind is opposed to mind as body is to body; whereby two, or at most ten little minds must be stronger than one great mind. But the plain

truth—very plain, we think—is, that minds are opposed to minds in quite a different way—and one man that has a higher wisdom or a hitherto unknown spiritual truth in him is stronger—not than ten men who have it not, nor than ten thousand—but than all men who have it not, and stands among them with quite an ethereal, angelic power.”

If this sentiment is just, as it seems to be, a considerate, religious people will give to the influence of such a man its corresponding weight. It is no more than “his due” to have a certain control over public opinion, that he may purify and raise it to his high standard, and give the impress of his own fine spirit to the character of his age. Reverence is due to virtue, talents, and prescriptive rights; and in a country where there are no hereditary social distinctions, it is of unspeakable importance that the people should be imbued with a spirit of order and subordination—should respect the dignity and authority of office, and give support to all the barriers against licentiousness, which may exist in their civil institutions or their venerable associations.

Christianity cherishes this spirit. While it acknowledges the original equality of all men, it encourages and rewards the generous efforts of the noblest minds. It “renders to all their due,” honor, reverence, and power to men whose superior talents and virtues qualify them to exert a beneficent influence over the destinies of their humbler fellow-beings. And in this way it protects human rights alike from the fury of a fierce and misguided multitude, and from the remorseless oppression of an organized despotism. It was not until revolutionary France had abjured the Gospel, and cast off the fear of God and the love of man, that she tasted alternately the bitterness of both these forms of misery.

There are other and sublimer respects in which our religion teaches us that we are all equal. We are all sinful men, who hope for mercy in the same blessed dispensation of pardon and life. We are all children of one common Father, cher-

ished alike by his everlasting love. The pure air of Heaven breathes with equal freshness—the green and beautiful earth sends forth the same fragrance—the sun shines—the rain falls—and all nature unfolds its rich and varied bounty, alike for the high and the lowly. And the happiness which resides in the hidden depths of the soul—the thrilling and powerful affections which gladden and bless life, are common to all mankind.

Nor can any outward advantages, that men covet, exclude the bitterest sorrows of life. They make no defence against pain, sickness, mortified pride, disappointed affection, or blighted hope. The blasts of misfortune sweep over the face of society and the loftiest objects are often the severest sufferers. There is a sublime philosophy that may teach us alike to bear—there is a sublimer religion which may teach us alike to remove, the anguish of a wounded spirit. As heirs of a common immortality, we are all brothers of the same household of faith. As spirits of heavenly origin and heavenly destiny we are bound to the same eternal home of the soul, where no distinction can survive but that which belongs to the greatest in the kingdom of Heaven—the purest, truest, most devoted soldier of Christ.

As Christians then we recognise as our friends and equals all whom our Saviour was not ashamed to call his brethren. Our points of difference are trifling, compared with our relations and prospects, the worth and the hopes of our imperishable nature, which we share equally with our brothers of the human race. These affecting considerations have a tendency to exalt the humble and bring down the pride of the lofty. They instruct the powerful to rule in the fear of God and the love of man. They instruct the weak who enjoy their private rights under the shelter of beneficent authority, to preserve harmony and subordination—to “render to all their dues; honor to whom honor, and obedience to whom obedience is due.”

Again ; Christianity affords protection to human rights, by its agency in civilizing mankind. Wherever its power is felt, it finds man or it makes him a civilized being. It cannot be the religion of barbarian hordes. It is too pure, spiritual, and kind for tribes whose business is war and whose delight is carnage. It gives moral power the ascendancy over brute force ; or rather, by its social spirit, it binds men into communities and places their physical force under the control of intelligent and noble minds, that it may be employed for wise and benevolent purposes. It rescues them from the dominion of violence and wrong, and gives them the protection of social courtesy, Christian principle, and equal law. Its tendency is to abolish war, that great invader of right and comfort ; even in its very imperfect operation, it greatly diminishes its horrors. If it does not prevent secret injustice, it saves us from open outrage. It gradually forms a public sentiment, which disarms oppression of its severity, and ultimately organizes a moral power strong enough to throw it off. The renovation of man's moral nature is not more complete than that of his social character and condition. I know there are some who admire what they call the innocent simplicity of savage and pagan life. But it is all a dream of romance ; it never had existence, save in the fictions of poetry. Uncultivated man is everywhere mean, slavish, and sensual ; or cruel, fierce, and vindictive. The elegant courtesies of civilized life—the mere offspring of fashion—are better than his stern virtues, for they bear some resemblance to that “charity which seeketh not her own.”

It cannot be doubted that our religion is a powerful element of human refinement. Wherever it exists in any degree of purity, there is something heavenly to counteract our earthly, downward tendencies. Its movement is upward, and it either carries man upward with it, or it leaves him behind to the influence of a less exalted faith. It elevates our whole moral nature by filling our minds with the sublimest objects of thought in their most affecting connexions. It reveals to us the grand and in-

finite in the works and character of God, and the ties which bind all created beings to their common Father and their common happiness and dignity, as shadows of his image and “partakers of his own nature.” And how peaceful, kind, and holy are its domestic and social influences ! “Love is the fulfilling of the divine law, for God is love.” And the spirit of this law develops in the human heart the pure and strong affections, which can have a quiet home only in the bosom of cultivated society. It inculcates social virtues, which can find exercise only in the multiplied relations of civilized life. It is a spirit of love, intense and glowing in the narrow circle of domestic sympathy—a generous patriotism, as it enlarges and embraces the country which is the asylum of our happiness—an expansive and universal good-will, as it extends to the whole family of our common Father. Thus the minds of all wise and good men are linked together by secret sympathies, and their efforts are easily united in the cause of knowledge, virtue, civil right, and social happiness.

It may be thought that I have stated in too unqualified terms the necessity of Christianity to civilization and to the security of personal rights. It may be said that nations have been highly civilized, and have lived long under liberal institutions, without the instructions of the Gospel. But I am persuaded that the history of the pagan world affords no real exception to the truth of my remarks. It is certain that, in the most enlightened states of antiquity, knowledge was confined to the privileged few. The benefit of civilization never extended to the general mass, and never gave security to their individual rights. The democracies and aristocracies of Greece and Rome were worse governed than some of the absolute monarchies of Modern Europe. They wanted that public moral sentiment which is the best protection of private man in every Christian community. The commons had no defence against the aggressions of lawless power—the opulent and distinguished had no shelter from the unbridled caprice of an ignorant multitude.

The genius of a government is not determined by the name it bears. I care not what you call the organs of power—that people only is free whose individual rights are secured by wise and permanent laws; laws, I mean, which derive permanence from the spirit and character of the nation. A government of arbitrary will, whether administered by one or many, is essentially a despotism. A democracy may be immeasurably more oppressive than the domination of any single tyrant, inasmuch as the countenance of numbers combined in injustice takes away the feeling of responsibility and impairs the restraining force of public sentiment. There is nothing so fearful, so ominous to human rights, as the reign of an ill-informed, wrong-headed majority. It is not then the sense of the people, but the folly, passion, madness of the people, which bears sway.

From the preceding course of thought it may be inferred, that the security of personal rights does not depend on any particular form of government—but on principles, which lie deep in the national character, and qualify the action of all political systems. A sound and enlightened public opinion is the only competent protection of individuals. It is an old and common remark, that general intelligence and virtue are essential to the permanence of republican institutions. It is undoubtedly true, that in the eager competition of selfish and ambitious men, nothing but an irresistible moral power can control their dissocial passions and make any civil institutions worth preserving. Private right can never be secure when public sentiment is depraved, for there are always unprincipled men, in and out of office, who will be no better than public opinion compels them to be; and who will do all the wrong which can be done with impunity.

It is no new doctrine that Christian principles are the elements of public as well as private virtue. They afford an easy standard, by which common minds can measure political rectitude; and thus create a public sentiment which subjects official conduct to a severe scrutiny. It is not easy to over-

estimate the value of Christianity as a social principle. It inspires mutual and universal good-will. It teaches us that the well-being of each is bound up in the virtue and happiness of all. "No man liveth to himself." Gifted minds have learned to consider nothing, which bears a portion of the Divine Image, as too low and mean for their notice. They have been taught to love human nature, and to combine their efforts to raise, improve, and assist it to fulfil its destinies, by disseminating knowledge downwards through the immense masses which form the solid foundations of society. In this way only can the moral and physical power of a community be made to act harmoniously for the safety of each and the good of the whole. And among a people bound together by ties of Christian affection, where each generous spirit has much to love and much to lose, the word *patriotism* is full of meaning—the expression "our country" is rich in endearing associations.

I am not disposed to be a prophet of evil, or to throw a gloom over the festivities of this occasion by indulging a querulous spirit. But there is something to be feared, as well as to be hoped, in the aspect of the times. It is a period of great bustle, excitement, and "religious action"—as it begins to be technically called; but amidst all the outward "pomp and circumstance" of religion, its inward, vital spirit is in danger. If its influence should cease to act efficiently upon the national character, our free institutions, whose deep foundations rest on the virtue and wisdom of the people, will lose their value and disappoint the dearest hope of the human race. And are there not alarming indications of such degeneracy? Are there not some unequivocal symptoms of corruption? Have we not, in some respects, fallen from the stern virtue of our ancestors, into precisely those sins which are most certain to dim the glory and blight the hopes of a nation? In some of our new states and territories population has so rapidly outgrown the means of instruction, that civilization and Christianity seem to be going backward together. The retrograde movement is

sweeping along the mass of the nation, and disastrously affecting our public councils.

It is in vain to disguise the fact, that multitudes have been encouraged to seek, and some are enjoying, the base reward of baser services. Less regard than formerly, is now paid to the characters of candidates for office. Less weight is given to the influence of great and good men. The passions of the multitude are the law, and demagogues enough are found to inflame and mislead them. I am afraid of this downward tendency. I fear for the direction which public sentiment is taking. I fear we have, as a nation, less genuine patriotism, less virtuous principle, and less capacity for self-government now, than when a foreign power left us, at the close of the revolution, worn out and impoverished by the struggle.

I mean no reflection on any individuals or any body of men. I have nothing to do with the collisions of party. But a minister of Christ may be allowed to speak of national sins, and lament that the foul spirit of faction, the shameful scrambling for office, and the open venality of the press have been for some years poisoning the fountains of public opinion, and shaking the confidence of wise men in republican institutions. Unless reason and principle govern, but little reliance can be placed on outward forms. The spirit of Christianity is "a spirit of power, of love, and of a sound mind." Let this spirit pervade the nation—let the high and the low feel its influence, and it will check the selfish passions, correct crude and impracticable notions of equality and rotation in office, and keep down that disorganizing spirit of innovation, which is forcing opinion from channels that time has hallowed, and torturing society by endless schemes and experiments.

Finally, the Christian religion affords security to the rights of men, chiefly by the peaceful spirit which it breathes. It is eminently a religion of peace. Its founder is the "Prince of Peace." His coming was welcomed by the choral song of the "Heavenly host, proclaiming peace on earth and good-will

among men." A warlike spirit is in the highest degree fatal to the rights and happiness of mankind. Objects so dear can never be safely entrusted to the protection of a hireling army, which may repel one spoiler, and afterwards become itself the instrument of an oppression more galling and more hopeless. Such an army as a state of war requires, is placed, by its organization and employments, out of the circle of social sympathies. In scenes of blood, and in the "agony of mortal strife," the common soldier is hardened into a merciless indifference to human rights and human sufferings; and the statesmen and generals, who direct the movements of warfare, are too much engrossed by its general results to regard the details of private ruin and misery. In the conflict of nations then, when large masses, animated by the genius of carnage, are moving on to the work of wholesale destruction, we cannot expect that obscure individuals will be considered. There is another danger. War unavoidably concentrates power in the hands of men, who, from long habits of despotic command, are more likely than any others to abuse it for the purposes of an unscrupulous ambition. A military career, begun perhaps in the glow of youthful patriotism, has often ended in a violent and bloody usurpation.

But even this is not the only nor the greatest evil; for a military usurper may be put down by a people exasperated by a sense of their wrongs. They can never be greatly or long oppressed, while they have clear heads and firm hearts and strong arms to resist the aggressions of power. The great danger is, that the people themselves will be dazzled and misled; and that public sentiment will become corrupt, when a military spirit prevails. Then there will be an extravagant over-estimate of heroes. To lead armies will be regarded as the sublimest employment of man. To ride on the storm of battle, to march to victory through the blood of the dead and the dying, is better than to have virtue, wisdom, and all the accomplishments that can adorn and bless a peaceful life. Wo

to the land over which this war-breathing spirit has swept in its madness. It inspires an insane admiration for mere military distinction—unsupported perhaps by the talents of a statesman, or the virtues of a man. How often have nations been enslaved and ruined by this infatuation! How often have their severest calamities flowed from the love of war and the pride of conquest! Christianity gives us a better standard of human worth. If a people generally receive it in its purity and its power, they will learn to place delegated authority in the hands of wise and good rather than of shining men, that every thing dear to them may be safe under its protecting shade.

Let me not be misapprehended. In censuring, as I have done, the unhallowed spirit of war, I believe that I speak the prevailing sentiment of the militia of this commonwealth. I can feel nothing but respect for a body which has more than once been our country's only defence in the hour of danger. Its very existence averted the horrors of war from our altars and fire-sides, when a hostile fleet was hovering on our shores.

I denounce offensive warfare as unholy and inconsistent with that religion which reflects the image of our blessed Saviour. I lament that it should ever be necessary to oppose force to force, even for self-preservation. All good men will earnestly pray that the time may soon come, when international differences may be settled, at proper tribunals, on principles of reason, religion, and public law. But in the present state of the world it seems chimerical to hope for permanent security without physical defences. How indeed can we expect that religion will enable us to dispense with the means of resistance, before its pure spirit has subdued human passions and disarmed wrong, rapine, and violence? National weakness is the strongest of all temptations to an unprincipled aggressor. Such was the opinion of the wise and good men who framed our constitution. They made it the duty of our citizens to be armed—not to encourage war—but to maintain peace. I respect the militia as a defensive system—a peaceful institution. Its object

is peaceful—its temper is peaceful. We seek nothing but protection in the great body of armed citizens, quick to perceive and strong to defend our rights. I wish not to diminish its power; if it were as strong as a seven-fold wall of brass around our country, we should never be disturbed by war. It is identified with the people—its interest is the general good; and whenever public sentiment utters its deep voice, it will stand forth in its undisciplined, but giant power, against domestic treachery or foreign invasion. It is too firm in its attitude to dread aggression from abroad—too complicated in its elements to be wielded by a faction at home—too enlightened and patriotic to become the instrument of any oppression.

I remark in passing, that the militia system is growing unpopular. There is a disposition, not to reform, but to destroy it. I regret that such a disposition exists, but I cannot believe that it will prevail. Our constitution has made the militia the perpetual guardian of peace and order, and placed its existence beyond the power of legislative bodies. I say nothing of the details of the system—I fear they are needlessly oppressive—I know they have exposed it to public derision—I leave the defects in its organization to those, whose duty it is to rectify them. Prudent and experienced men, who have not imbibed too much of the restless “spirit of the age,” will for a long time to come look upon a militia as the bulwark of our safety. And they will countenance and honor it, as combining a moral and physical power, so distributed and balanced that it cannot be concentrated for an unworthy purpose—a power, which is unconquerable against invasion, but impotent for offensive warfare.

Gentlemen of the Ancient and Honorable Artillery Company,

I hope to meet your approbation in addressing you—not as a band of men, breathing the fierce spirit of war and dazzled by its false glory—but as citizens, ready to defend the rights and maintain the peace of your country. War has no charms and no glories for you. The distinctions which you cov-

et, are to be found in the professions and arts of peace. When your duty calls you, as now, to assume the arms and bearing of the soldier, it is with no hostile purpose. You come to the temple of God, and the day of your anniversary is sacred to high remembrances and full of religious associations. If you have any thing of the spirit of your pious fathers, you are called upon as patriot citizens and as Christian men to consider the control which your high social position may give you over public sentiment. Let the whole weight of your influence go undivided and unimpaired to the cause of peace, virtue, and the religious institutions of your country. May you never be assembled in arms with a less pacific purpose than on this day. But should the occasion ever come, that calls forth your martial spirit, I doubt not that you will prove yourselves men, worthy of your ancestors. When the state is in danger—when there is invasion from abroad, or treachery, misrule, or usurpation at home—and the good, the strong, and the brave are pressing shoulder to shoulder to defend what is dear to the heart of every free man—then you, fellow citizens, sustained by the strength of your cause and the blessing of the “Lord of Hosts,” will be ready to lead them on to victory—but for your country’s peace and safety.
